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The Hizballah-North Korean Nexus

by Carl Anthony Wege

A significant relationship between Hizballah and North Korea, facilitated by Iran, has developed over the last two decades. This relationship has changed the configuration of Hizballah and shaped it into a more formidable military entity. The famed Hizballah Model now includes a North Korean flavor.

In the early twentieth century Paris sought to create a Christian-Arab state¹ in the environs of Mt. Lebanon² to further French political objectives. Lebanon was established with a confessional system³ dominated by a Maronite-Sunni axis to the disadvantage of the Shi'a.

This confessional system stratified Lebanese political institutions and society in a way that became increasingly untenable precipitating a civil war in 1975. The Lebanese fratricide included Palestinians, Israelis, and Syrians. Clan, tribe, and confessional association became more important than any intermediating Lebanese political institutions. The outbreak of the war in the spring of 1975 was followed by a Syrian intervention in 1976 and Israeli invasions in 1978 and 1982.

Among the Shi'a the 1982 Israeli-Lebanon war catalyzed the emergence of Islamic Amal (Amal Al-Islamiyah), led by Hussein Musawi⁴ when he and hundreds of followers from Musa Sadr's original AMAL⁵ organization streamed east to Baalbek in Lebanon's Bekka valley⁶ joining Sheikh Subhi Tufayli's cadre from Lebanon's al-Dawah (the Islamic Call).⁷ A coalition developed between the Musawi organization, the followers of Sheikh Subhi al-Tufayli,⁸ and

¹. This 'greater Lebanon' (Etat du Grand Liban) created by France would encompass areas historically ruled by Fakhr al-Din (Fakhreddine II 1572–1635) and Bashir II (1788-1840). See Hanf, Theodor. *Coexistence In Wartime Lebanon*. Oxford: The Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1993, p. 64.

². Mt. Lebanon was created as a separate administrative region within the Ottoman empire at the behest of the European powers following massacres of Christians during civil strife in 1860.

³. This confessional system formally as well as informally segregated political institutions along sectarian lines based on a single census of questionable veracity.

⁴. The Musawi clan members in the AMAL movement were more sympathetic to Iran's 1979 revolution than other Shi'a clans associated with AMAL.

⁵. These were primarily al-Dawah members who had infiltrated AMAL before Iran's Revolution intending to maneuver the organization in an Islamist direction.

⁶. Hussein and his followers left the AMAL center in Beirut and seized AMAL offices and ordinance depots in the Bekka valley town of Baalbek.

⁷. Originally an Iraqi Shi'a Islamist organization created by Baqr al-Sadr (a cousin of Musa Sadr) in 1958, Lebanon's al-Dawah (the Islamic Call) was formed in the late 1960s. Lebanon's al-Dawah officially dissolved itself in 1980 in response to Khomeini's admonitions concerning Western style party organization. In practice this had little impact as al-Dawah's members were subsumed into the larger Hizballah movement. Those retaining less formal adherence to Dawah ideology tended to follow Hussein Fadlallah. They were heavily penetrated by Syrian intelligence by the late 1990s although they continued training at Hizballah camps until they created their own facilities in 1996. See *Intelligence Online* 19 February 1998.

⁸. Sheikh Subhi al-Tufayli commanded the operational headquarters of Hizballah in Baalbek in close coordination with the Pasdaran. See Ranstorp, Magnus. "Hizballah's Command Leadership: Its Structure, Decision-Making and Relationship with Iranian Clergy and Institutions." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 6 (3), pg. 305. Tufayli was later Secretary General of Hizballah but was ultimately expelled in 1998 over his opposition to Hizballah's more moderate course. He then created a 'Revolution of the Hungary' (Thawrat al-Jiya') from his bastion in the Brital region of the Bekka in 1999 but the movement failed and Tufayli was marginalized as the century closed. See Shahanon *The Shi'a of Lebanon*, pg. 123.

other Shi'a factions. The Sepahe al-Quds (Jerusalem) elements of Iran's Pasdaran (Padan-e Inqilal-e Islami or Revolutionary Guards) in coordination with the Iranian Embassy's in Beirut and Damascus,⁹ deployed in the eastern Bekka in July of 1982, built on this and Hizballah¹⁰ was born.¹¹

Iran's Book of Victory

The deployment of the Pasdaran in Lebanon furthered Tehran's foreign policy goals by promoting an Islamic Republic in Lebanon. In the early 1980s many Pasdaran fighters were familiar with Lebanon having received their initial guerrilla training there under PLO auspices in the struggle to overthrow the Shah¹². This history facilitated Pasdaran relations with various Islamist elements within the Bekka's Shi'a community.¹³ In 1983 and 1984 Hizballah developed regional organizations first in the Bekka (particularly in Brital, Hermel, and Baalbek), then Beirut, and finally in the south of Lebanon.¹⁴ Hizballah initially included elements of clan based criminal networks¹⁵ but, in the absence of state institutions, Hizballah both rendered a form of justice and was a source of social services.

The end of Lebanon's civil war saw Hizballah engage a two track policy in Lebanon. Hizballah's military wing, the Islamic Resistance, continued operations aimed at the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon and provided armed protection for the Shi'a community in Lebanon. The second track saw Hizballah enter Lebanese parliamentary politics abiding by the political norms established with the 1989 Peace of Ti'af.¹⁶ With Ti'af Hizballah compromised its earlier vision of an Islamic Republic outlined in the 1985 "Open Letter to the Oppressed of the Earth." This compromise was manifested in Hizballah's 2009 manifesto that committed the organization to consensus democracy in Lebanon. Nonetheless, Hizballah arms, allied with Iran and coordinated with Syria, continued to dominate the Lebanese arena.

Iran has maintained diplomatic relations with the DPRK since 1973 but it's alliance with North Korea, which began during the Iran-Iraq War¹⁷, is currently anchored in Tehran's intent to

⁹. See Aboul-Enein, Youssef and Rudolph Atallah. "Hizballah: A Discussion of Its Early Formation." *Infantry*, 94 (3) May / June 2005 pg. 24. See also *Al-Muharrar*, Lebanon 28 July 1989. Iranian Ambassador to Damascus Mohammed Hassan Skhtari was instrumental in building Hizballah on the ground in the Bekka.

¹⁰. Iran decided to foster an Islamist organization using the Pasdaran rather than working with the more secularly oriented AMAL.

¹¹. "Islamic Jihad Seen As Pro-Iran" *New York Times* 19 April 1983, p.12. The first Iranian volunteers were apparently sheltered at the Imam al-Mahdi school in Baalbek with an Iranian communications center in Ballbeks al-Khayyam hotel before the Guard acquired their better known bases in the valley. See Miller, Judith. *God Has Ninety Nine Names*. New York: Touchstone Books, 1996, pg. 282.

¹². North Korean aid to Palestinian factions in Lebanon, no doubt in the service of Soviet interests goes as far back as the early 1980s. See "Presence of North Koreans in Southern Lebanon" *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, Voice of Lebanon 24 June 1981.

¹³. It is perhaps worth noting that Fatah historically had good relations with and some association with the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood. It is therefore not too extraordinary that they would make some common cause with Islamists among the Shi'a opposition. Arafat had previously co-opted Musa Al-Sadr and convinced him to allow Fatah to train early AMAL cadre. This even though the 1980s would also see Palestinian-Shi'a conflicts during the so-called war of the camps.

¹⁴. See Shanahan, *The Shi'a of Lebanon*, pg. 114

¹⁵. In this organizational sense they shared some characteristics with mid-20th century La Costa Nostra families.

¹⁶. The Peace of Ta'if (the Wathiqat al-Mithaq al-Watani) was signed in the Saudi port of Ta'if in October of 1989 under Saudi and Syrian tutelage. It made some adjustments to Lebanon's pre civil war political system while maintaining the characteristic allocation of political power along confessional lines.

¹⁷. It was North Korean, as well as American and Israeli, supplied arms that made Iran's successful 1987 offensive against Iraq possible.

acquire and deploy a nuclear deterrent serving the twin aims of safeguarding Iran's Islamic Revolution and achieving regional great power status. North Korea, desperate to maintain its neo-Stalinist tyranny, will engage in any activity¹⁸ that will provide hard currency¹⁹. Mercenary adventures and criminal enterprise became significant sources of income for Kim Jong Il's regime. The mutually beneficial relationship that developed between Iran and North Korea secondarily benefits Hizballah with Iran financing North Korean efforts that strengthen Iran's Lebanese ally. Hizballah receives assistance from North Korea that could not be readily furnished otherwise by Iran thus furthering Tehran's interests in Lebanon.

North Korean Arms and Training

North Korean arms reach Hizballah through the good offices of both Iran and Syria.

While arms transfers from North Korea to Hizballah have been significant they are focused primarily on components for improved versions of Syrian produced Katyushas, Grads, and other rockets. Even with rudimentary targeting systems and small warhead these weapons are quite difficult to suppress and can be fairly disruptive to life in the enemy camp when fired in large numbers as the citizens of Northern Israel can attest. Iran likewise proffers military support of Hizballah both directly and via Syria. Iran and North Korea, for example, jointly produce the 300 km range M600 series rockets with a fraction of the production supplied to both Syria and Hizballah²⁰. Otherwise, the methods apparently used by Tehran to subvert various UN sanctions and embargo regimes are straightforward if not terribly efficient. Iran simply uses a complex of shell companies, vendors, multiple purchases, and transfer modalities to acquire arms and other prohibited materials under for itself and its proxies such as Hizballah.²¹ The recipients of the purchase orders engage in varying degrees of acquiescence in the subterfuge with the DPRK acting as a full partner in the enterprise. North Korea has institutionalized an arms smuggling system²² using seaports favored by arms smugglers such as Hong Kong and Singapore and similarly favored countries in the Near East including Lebanon and Cyprus.²³ A North Korean defector managing the illicit trade outlined for the *Chosun Ilbo* a system wherein cadre from the Korean People's Army who have been trained at Pyongyang University of Foreign Studies work with "forwarders" from foreign states. Containers are moved across the Yalu river into China a third or half full of weapons. In China the containers are transshipped to a third country and filled with unrelated freight while relevant paperwork is completed. In this instance there is no need for false end user certificates since the arms are never acknowledged. Nonetheless moving

¹⁸. This includes straightforward criminal enterprise taken to the point of becoming institutionalized through the Central Committee Bureau 39 of the Korean Workers Party as far back as 1974. It is thought to be headed by Kim Tong-un, a former industrialist, supervising a headquarters staff of roughly 130. See Kan, Paul Rexton, Bruce E. Bechtol, Jr. and Robert M. Collins "Criminal Sovereignty: Understanding North Korea's Illicit International Activities," *Strategic Studies Institute* March 2010 www.StrategicStudiesInstitute.army.mil accessed March 2010. See also "North Korean Dollar Store" *Vanity Fair* 5 August 2009.

¹⁹. Arms sales provide about a billion dollars per year to the North Korean regime.

²⁰. "IDF reveals intel on huge Hezbollah arms stockpile in Southern Lebanon" *Ha'aretz* 8 July 2010. An alternative modality has the M600 technology originating in China and moving from there to Iran and Syria.

²¹. The result of the emergent 'cat and mouse' game is full employment for those collection disciplines involving in situ and remote sensing. U.S. authorities attempt to track arms transfers and alert local governments most likely to act and the DPRK attempts to evade said surveillance.

²². United Nations Security Council Resolution 1874, passed in 2009 along with previously passed resolutions, has attempted to end arms transfers from North Korea to other states.

²³. "The covert arms trade: The second oldest profession." *The Economist* 12 February 1994, pg. 21. Less frequently such arms are moved by air as in the case of the Georgian registered Ilyushin IL-76 originating in Pyongyang interdicted with 35 tons of weapons following an emergency landing in Bangkok. See "North Korean plane carrying smuggled arms seized in Thailand" *Sunday Guardian* 13 December 2009.

the cargo through ports in Asia and the Near East thought to be lax in illegal arms interdiction efforts decreases the chance for the undeclared arms to be discovered. After being filled with said unrelated freight in the third country the cargo is again mixed with additional innocuous freight in Hong Kong or Singapore before shipment to the Middle East²⁴. In furtherance of this illicit arms trade the North Koreans have developed some expertise in reverse engineering and then producing foreign military hardware. The primary manufacturing facility for this enterprise is the Kanggye General Tractor Plant number 26 in North Korea's Jagang province²⁵. Syria's Scientific Study Research Center²⁶, for example, entered into an agreement with North Korea's Mining Development Trading Corp. (KOMID)²⁷, to reverse engineer and produce the Russian made Kornet²⁸ antitank missiles used so successfully by Hizballah against the IDF during the Summer War.²⁹ KOMID was superseded by Green Pine Associated Corporation in 2009 as the major entity involved in illegal arms trading on behalf of North Korea.

Syria established diplomatic relations with North Korea in 1966 and began receiving some of its own military equipment from the DPRK in the 1980s. Bashar Assad, assuming power following his father's death in June of 2000 entered into a much closer relationship with North Korea than had previously existed. Whereas Hafez Assad, the well-known Lion of Damascus, was careful to keep Iran, Hizballah, and North Korea at arm's length Bashar embraced them in full-fledged alliances³⁰. By 2006 Syria was receiving nearly a quarter of its own military hardware from North Korea.³¹ Iran finances many of these Syrian arms purchases strengthening its deterrence against Israel, Syria gets a portion of the shipments and Hizballah again gets a share.

Some Hizballah cadre received military training by the North Koreans as far back as the later 1980s and early 1990s³². *Intelligence Online* reported Hassan Nasrallah himself, as well as Mustafa Badreddine, the organizations counter espionage chief during the Summer War, and Ibrahim Akil spent months training in North Korea.³³ A more substantial North Korean contribution to Hizballah's order of battle has been the military training provided by Pyongyang to a steady stream of senior and command level Hizballah cadre.³⁴ Following the 2006 war,

²⁴. "How North Korea Goes About Exporting Arms" *The Chosun Ilbo* 10 March 2010.

²⁵. Ibid. The plant employs upwards of 10,000 workers and is also believed involved in chemical weapons production.

²⁶. The Scientific Studies and Research Center included the Syria Higher Institute of Applied Science and Technology and the Electronics Institute and National Standards and Calibration Laboratory as subsidiary entities.

²⁷. North Korea changed the name of KOMID to Kapmun Tosong Trade following the imposition of UN sanctions in 2009. Chasongdang Trade, Heungjin Trading Company, and Chongsong Yonhap are North Korea companies likewise involved in illicit arms trading. See "N. Korea Fakes Trade Documents to Export WMDs" *Dong-A Ilbo* 1 September 2010.

²⁸. The Kornet E is the model generally used for export was developed by KBP instrument Design Bureau based in Tula, the Russian Federation. Eight copies were shipped to North Korea by freighter. See Kyodo news agency 2 June 2009.

²⁹. "N. Korea to mass-produce Syria-provided missile" *Associated Press*, 2 June 2009.

³⁰. Bergman, Ronen *The Secret War With Iran* New York, London, Toronto, and Sydney: Free Press, 2007, pgs. 354 -355.

³¹. Shichor, Yitzhak "Evil from the North: The DPRK-Syria Axis and its Strategic Dimensions" *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* Vol. XIX, No.4, Winter 2007, pg. 79.

³². The quality of instruction at facilities popularly designated as terrorist training camps varies tremendously. Camps maintained by various Palestinian factions in Lebanon over the years focused more on indoctrination and inculcation of the faction's behavioral norms than on military skills. Training provided the Palestinian's under Syrian auspices were intended to further Syrian foreign policy objectives as was training provided in the old Soviet bloc. Iran has developed a more germane and effective camp system for training terrorists in relevant military skills and clandestine operations. The North Koreans historically were involved in training foreign terrorists to pay for Soviet aid to Pyongyang and have continued to engage in the practice to raise hard currency since the Soviet aid cutoff in the early 1990s.

³³. "Hezbollah a North Korean-Type Guerrilla Force" *Intelligence Online* 7 September 2006

³⁴. The majority of Hizballah guerrillas are, of course, trained in Iran. Since the Summer War roughly 300 per month travel from Beirut to Tehran for three month training cycles. See "Hizballah turns to Iran for new weapons and training" *Independent London* 8 April 2008.

Iran's Pasdaran negotiated agreements with Pyongyang to provide training courses in North Korea for approximately 100 Hizballah field commanders. That training apparently included advanced commando training with North Korea's Special Forces as well as intelligence and counter espionage training.³⁵ Arab armies have historically suffered from deficiencies in military discipline and command and control. North Korea's People's Army lacks many things but it does not lack discipline or command and control. Hizballah, since its founding has been relatively well disciplined and North Korean trainers have been able to accentuate and focus that discipline in a way that significantly improved Hizballah military potential and its resilience under IDF assault. In the 1990s most Hizballah training in North Korea was likely carried out through the VIII Special Corps of the Korea People's Army. Joseph Bermudez argued that North Korean terrorist training was carried out by the VIII Special Corps of the Korea People's Army³⁶ as well as the Reconnaissance Bureau operating under the General Staff and State Security Department Staff. While in Pyongyang those foreign trainees were generally segregated in the Chol Bongri district. There were two basic cycles for foreign terrorists being trained in North Korea. A three to six month short course has a focus on typical military skills traditional to guerrilla forces. A longer twelve to twenty four month course had focus on command, intelligence, communication and related skills. It would be this longer course that would have been of greater value to Hizballah commanders as basic guerrilla training can be done more readily in Iran.³⁷

In 2009 North Korea's Reconnaissance General Bureau (also called unit 586) was reorganized under Kim Young-chol in a way impacting Hizballah's relationship with the DPRK. The espionage departments of the Korean Workers Party, the operational military reconnaissance units, and "room 35" managing international intelligence were merged within this reorganized Reconnaissance General Bureau now reporting directly to the National Defense Commission.³⁸ The current Bureau Three under the larger Reconnaissance Bureau is a reconfigured variant of Room 35 dealing with overseas intelligence (although historically Room 35 had little presence in the Near East). Bureau Five of the Reconnaissance General Bureau is apparently tasked with information technology operations³⁹ which may include number 110 Research Center. The 110 Research Center in addition to employing 500-600 computer hackers also encompasses overseas branches.⁴⁰ Given Hizballah's notably improved SIGINT capacity evidenced during the Summer War and its reportedly improved cyber capabilities there is a reasonable possibility that 110 Research Center has played a role in Hizballah – North Korean training exchanges. To the extent that North Korean personnel have acted as trainers or advisors to Hizballah on the ground in Lebanon, Syria, or Iran it is likely they were personnel from Bureau Two of the Reconnaissance General Bureau, which includes the sniper brigades (an elite special operations force)⁴¹ sometimes deployed outside North Korea.

³⁵ "Hezbollah Training in North Korea" [Intelligence Online](#) 25 April 2007

³⁶ The VIII Special Corps was created in 1969 and headquartered at Tokchon-up with facilities in Wonhung-ri, Yongbyon, Sangwon Haeju, Nampo, and Wonsan. Joseph S. Bermudez Jr., editor of [KPA Journal](#), thoughtfully advises that in roughly the 1990s time frame VII Special Corps was superseded by the Light Infantry Training Guidance Bureau.

³⁷ Bermudez, Joseph S. [North Korean Special Forces](#) Naval Institute Press: Annapolis, Maryland, 1998, pgs 140-141.

³⁸ "N. Korea's Command Center of Clandestine Operations" [Chosun Ilbo](#) 21 April 2010.

³⁹ "Reconnaissance General Bureau is heart of NK terrorism" [Korea Herald](#) 26 May 2010.

⁴⁰ "N. Korea Hacks into S. Korea-U.S. Defense Plans" [Chosun Ilbo](#) 18 December 2009. This would presumably be differentiated from Reconnaissance General Bureau department six with technical and signals responsibilities.

⁴¹ Joseph S. Bermudez Jr. "A New Emphasis on Operations Against South Korea" [38 North](#), U.S. Korea Institute at SAIS, Johns Hopkins University, June 11, 2010.

Underground Fortification

North Korea historically excelled at tunneling and underground bunker systems. In the decades following the Korean War the Korean People's Army developed tunneling and underground bunker systems in terms of both the particularized subterranean engineering skills and a military doctrine to utilize it. The Viet Cong applied a number of North Korean lessons in their own tunneling efforts during the Indochina conflict in areas like the Cu Chi military district within a dozen miles of Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City). Hizballah has likewise applied such practices for use against a technologically and numerically superior IDF through Tehran's relationship with Pyongyang.

In the aftermath of the 2006 Summer War Hizballah both expanded its military infrastructure into the Northern reaches of the Bekka Valley and developed a more extensive tunnel and bunker system⁴² in the Eastern Bekka along the border with Syria.⁴³ The tunnel and bunker system that so shocked the Israelis⁴⁴ during the Summer War was built under North Korean direction locally coordinated through General Mir Faysal Baqr Zadah of the IRGC, primarily in 2003 and 2004. The configuration and parameters of the tunnel system closely mirror the layout of such tunnels in the DMZ separating North and South Korea⁴⁵.

In the region south of the Litani river there were upwards of 600 ammunition and weapons bunkers. The Islamic Resistance fighters in south Lebanon's Shi'a villages were assigned one primary and two reserve munitions bunkers with local Hezbollah commanders knowing only the location of bunkers in their area of operations. Hizballah command bunkers were generally constructed to a depth of 40 meters. The construction process itself across south Lebanon involved a large number of successful deception operations. Bunkers constructed at locations identified as monitored by Israeli drones and those built under the observation of local Lebanese known by Hizballah to be compromised to Israel were generally decoys. Hizballah successfully concealed the construction of most of their active bunkers throughout the theater of operations⁴⁶. Bunker systems in the Bekka Valley also created with the assistance of the Pasdaran included entire underground weapons warehouses at a depth of eight or more meters as well as an alleged central operations room under the joint supervision of four Pasdaran and four Hizballah officers⁴⁷. The North Koreans helping to build the underground system were apparently secreted into Lebanon using the guise of 'domestic workers' for Iranian diplomats.⁴⁸ The North Koreans were assisted by Iranian engineers in constructing far-reaching tunnel and

⁴². IDF nomenclature sometimes refers to these as 'nature reserves'

⁴³. "Targeting Iran's tunnel builders" [UPI](#) 9 March 2009.

⁴⁴. It probably also surprised the analysts at the Underground Facility Analysis Center in the United States whose job it is to map and analyze such facilities primarily in the context of nuclear weapons but also terrorist organizations. It is likely that analysts at the U.S. center had not successfully mapped or understood the system (or, if they did, it didn't make any difference in the war). The Israelis never knocked the bunker system out and Hizballah's command and control never broke down indicating the Israeli AMAN SIGINT unit 8200 likewise failed to listen in on relevant communication. Prior to the conflict Israel had managed to "paint" some of these bunkers with chemicals to assist the IAF in targeting but the bunker system ultimately could not be eliminated by the IAF.

⁴⁵. See "The North Korean Connection" [Jerusalem Post](#) 21 May 2010.

⁴⁶. See Lindermann, Captain Marc "The 2006 Lebanon War and the Evolution of Iranian Guard Tactics" [Military Review](#) May-June 2010, p. 107.

⁴⁷. "Iranian officer: Hezbollah has commando naval unit" [Sharq al-Awsat](#) 29 July 2006. It is worth noting in this context that the United States Army spent an inordinate amount of time during the Vietnam conflict chasing the ever ephemeral COSVN (Central Office South Viet Nam) thought to be in command of the communist war effort in the south. No such office was ever found.

⁴⁸. Ibid.

bunker system that meandered for 25 kilometers⁴⁹. The IRGC defector Ali Nuri Zadah, described parts of the system as having some openings of 12 to 18 square meters, mobile floors with each element of the system having four openings allowing the free movement of fighters.⁵⁰ Some of the border bunkers, particularly the command bunkers, were of poured concrete at 40 meters below the surface.⁵¹ Apparently there were ten or more tunnel and bunker networks spread across south Lebanon. One such network publically identified covered roughly two square kilometers with dozens of command bunkers inside the network divided into two or three rooms each⁵². Elements of South Lebanon's operational bunker system were lined with painted steel plates and power cables. Likewise Hizballah rocket firing positions were sometimes associated with these bunkers with one example showing a pair of firing pits at a depth of roughly five meters with foot thick poured concrete frames reinforced with Hesco blast walls and covered with sand bags. These well camouflaged firing pits allowed rockets to be fired with minimal heat signatures, further limited by thermal blankets, rendering the positions nearly invisible to Israeli airborne sensors.⁵³

Conclusion

Hizballah relations with North Korea are different than were the relations between the Palestinians and their many sponsors. North Korean interests are purely mercenary whereas Syria and other powers favored various Palestinian factions and promoted one over another in furtherance of competing national interests. The Palestinians never formed a coherent military threat against Israel. Fatah, the PFLP, and the amalgam of Palestinian factions were trained and supported by states with mutually antagonistic interests respecting each other as well as Israel. The Palestinians were united ethnically and politically in their grievance against Israel but militarily they were scattered to the winds. Hizballah, though catalyzed by Iran, grew organically from Lebanon's Shi'a community and became ethnically, politically, and militarily coherent.

The nexus between Hizballah and North Korea is enabled by Iran as Tehran inches toward regional great power status. Iran's classical Safavid's aspirations for greatness saw echoes in Khomeini's Velayat-e Faqih. Hizballah, as the dominate actor in the confederation forming the Lebanese government, is now as much ally as asset to Tehran. North Korea meanwhile, is less an ally to Iran or Hizballah; but rather a state with limited interests corresponding to Tehran's national interests. Iran's facilitation of North Korean assistance to Hizballah, as well as Syria, is a move furthering Iran's aspirations as a regional great power. The Persians played chess before the Arabs and centuries prior to the Europeans. They understand the complexities of the game. Iran's deft use of North Korea in support of Hizballah may maneuver opponents of Tehran's great power status into checkmate.

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⁴⁹. The major firms owned by the IRGC and specializing in underground engineering include Fater Engineering Institute, Imen Sazen Consultant Engineers Institute, and the Makin and Rahab Institutes. All are subsidiaries of Khatam al- Anbia. See "Targeting Iran's tunnel builders" *UPI* 9 March 2009.

⁵⁰. "Mining for trouble in Lebanon" *Jerusalem Post* 29 October 2007.

⁵¹. "IDF: Hizballah built mass bunker network" *Ynet News* 20 July 2006.

⁵². "Israeli troops use truce to hunt Hezbollah tunnels" *Khaleej Times* 28 August 2006.

⁵³. "Inside Hizballah's Hidden Bunkers" *Time* 29 March 2007.

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